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## (Non)integrated culture in Polonia Maior elementary schools – from the perspective of the teachers of integrated classrooms

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The Activities of Polish educational authorities are aimed at eliminating special education in Poland, for the development of integrated and inclusive education, following a model of certain European Union countries. Due to the new trends, the demand for special pedagogues in mainstream schools is increasing. Thus, the nature of both mainstream schools and mainstream pre-schools, as well as, special education establishments, is changing. Education of children with various types of development disorders has become a general educational problem. Not only does a narrow group of specialists deal with it, but it has also resulted in a change within the educational culture of Polish schools. In regard to the above, the school's culture towards the Different, can be either pro-integrated or anti-integrated. A very important role, in the process of shaping a specific school culture, is played by teachers, their motivation to work, their professional preparation and the way they perceive the development of students with disorders.

**KEY WORDS:** special education, students with disability, integration and inclusive education, main and assistant teacher, universal and special education culture

## The universal and the special educational culture in Polish schools

Facing the social changes, that have occurred in the recent years, there is an increasing number of activities for marginalised persons, that aim at the process of integration, and normalisation. Kowalik finds, that, just recently, the dependency of the persons with disabilities on the course of their education, has been noticed<sup>1</sup>. Previously, in the majority of the European countries, the dominant view was, that the children with disorders should not go to mainstream schools, as they would have to bear too much of a cost regarding the fact, experiencing psychological trauma in result of the feeling of inferiority, and of rejection from the group. A belief was universally held, that a student with a disability, in a mainstream school, would negatively influence the development of his able-bodied peers, making the process of education more difficult. For many years, the educational policies justified the activities that would discriminate the good of the able-bodied children, and the children with disabilities. In result, a separate system of educational institutions was founded, adjusted to the special needs of the students with various kinds and degrees of disability, however, it was of a segregated nature. The opponents of such a solution (mainly, the parents of the children with disabilities), had begun a struggle against a universal integration, titled *the same school for everyone* (*taka sama szkoła dla wszystkich*)<sup>2</sup>.

One of the priorities of modern education is the inclusion of children with special educational needs, to mainstream education<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> S. Kowalik, *Integracja uczniów niepełnosprawnych z uczniami pełnosprawnymi*, [in:] *Psychologia ucznia i nauczyciela*, (ed.) S. Kowalik, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2011, p. 276.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, p. 277.

<sup>3</sup> In Poland, the process of integrated education was initiated by the 7 September 1991 "On the educational system" („O systemie oświaty”) act, and regulated by the 4 October 1993 MEN regulations. It was a breakthrough moment, when a dramatic change was made, regarding the educational policies for persons with disabili-

A child with a disability, that attends integrated classrooms, expands own participation in social life, however, simultaneously, is threatened with rejection and discrimination, both from peers and the teachers<sup>4</sup>. The teachers see the causes of difficulties, experienced in the areas of integration, either in the features of the student, in his family, or in the insufficient support, or the lack of the appropriate conditions of integrated education. However, they often do not take any actions, that would expand their competencies, helpful in solving these difficulties. Also, the cooperation of the teachers (leading and support teachers<sup>5</sup>), often assumes inappropriate forms, leading to the fact that, "the integrated classrooms seem like combined classrooms: a *normal* and a *special classroom*, with different teachers, different curricula, and different courses of lessons"<sup>6</sup>.

Therefore, the positive effects of integrated education, depend not only on the features of the student with a disability (the type and the degree of his disability), or his family situation. The proper material and organisational conditions of the school, do not guarantee positive changes regarding integration as well. Teachers themselves, play a key role in this process, as their attitude towards integrated education, and their assumed work scheme in the classroom, with students with disabilities. Additionally, the independence of

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lities. See: 9 July 2017 MEN regulation on the conditions of schooling, education, and the guardianship of children and adolescents with disabilities, socially maladjusted, and threatened with social maladjustment (Journal of Laws 2017, no. 0, pos 1578).

<sup>4</sup> S. Kowalik, *Integracja uczniów niepełnosprawnych z uczniami pełnosprawnymi*, [in:] *Psychologia ucznia i nauczyciela*, (ed.) S. Kowalik, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2011, p. 288.

<sup>5</sup> The support teacher may also be defined as: supportive, subsidiary. Currently, the term in motion is: *co-organising the educational process*; see: Z. Gajdzica 2011b, p. 59. For the purpose of the article, I remain with the following terms: support and leading teacher (i.e. a teacher of a particular subject/early school and pre-school education), that functioned in the school environment, at the moment of conducting research for the dissertation.

<sup>6</sup> A. Kobylańska, *Wypalenie zawodowe u nauczycieli pracujących w klasach integracyjnych – próba badań*, [in:] *Dyskursy Pedagogiki Specjalnej. Od tradycjonalizmu do ponowoczesności*, (eds.) E. Górniewicz, A. Krause, Wydawnictwo UWM, Olsztyn 2002, p. 302.

the teacher is also important, regarding his choices, e.g. whether he wants to work in an integrated classroom. Otherwise, all educational reforms will be superficial, they will not encompass the preferred values, attitudes, or personal beliefs of all the participants of the process. "Understanding the biography of a particular teacher, and the classroom and school contexts, and cultures, is, therefore, essential for the successful proceeding of the process of change".<sup>7</sup>

The theory of inclusive education, and the accompanying dilemmas, are discussed in detail by Zamkowska (2013). Full inclusion assumes, that each school should be able to accept all students, regardless of their disorders. Regarding this approach, a child with a disability, must not prove their readiness to begin education in a mainstream school (as in an integrated education). The school has the duty to accept this group of students and provide them with the appropriate conditions, so that they could feel, that they belong to the school community<sup>8</sup>. "The requirement of proving the «readiness» of participating in a mainstream school, used by the advocates of integrated education was an essential argument for not accepting, or excluding a particular group of children, that did not meet certain requirements. The above was motivated by the concern regarding the educational success of the child with impeded development, that required prior rehabilitation, so that the child could handle the requirements and the pace of an integrated classroom".<sup>9</sup>

Within the context of these educational changes<sup>10</sup>, a number of sceptical voices appear, regarding accepting all children, particular-

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<sup>7</sup> Ch. Day, *Od teorii do praktyki. Rozwój zawodowy nauczyciela*, GWP, Gdańsk 2008, p. 150.

<sup>8</sup> A. Zamkowska, *Edukacja włączająca – wybrane dylematy*, [in:] *Racjonalność oraz uwarunkowania procesów terapeutycznych osób niepełnosprawnych*, (ed.) A. Klinik, vol. 16, Impuls, Kraków-Katowice 2013, p. 70; see: G. Thomas, *Inclusive school for an inclusive society*, *British Journal of Special Education* 1997, no. 24(3).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>10</sup> A detailed analysis of the education of children with disabilities, at the legal level, may be found in M. Gołubiew-Konieczna, *Integracja w edukacji – ewaluacja założeń integracyjnych w praktyce szkolnej*, [in:] *Edukacja integracyjna i włączająca w doświadczeniach pedagogów i nauczycieli*, (ed.) Z. Janiszewska-Nieścioruk, Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, Zielona Góra 2012, pp. 14-34.

ly, with severe or multiple disabilities, to mainstream schools. In a report by Warnock (1978), on the educational policies regarding the schooling of children with special educational needs, such process is referred to as "positive discrimination"<sup>11</sup>. The lack of an appropriate facilitation of mainstream schools<sup>12</sup> and the specifics of the process of learning of many students with severe intellectual disabilities, often cause the parents to choose special establishments, as those that would meet the educational, and social needs of their children<sup>13</sup>. Zamkowska, referring to A. Vlachou (2004), highlights that inclusive education, has not yet become a part of a broader educational policy, and, within the proclaimed educational reforms, is not treated as an essential matter, but as an additional change introduced under certain circumstances<sup>14</sup>.

The implementation of the premises of inclusive education, faces numerous barriers, not only financial ones. Most often, the mainstream schools discourage the parents of children with disabilities, informing them of numerous difficulties in ensuring their children with appropriate aid, and with the inability to provide for their specific needs regarding education. Teachers, deprived of a systemic support, as well as, of specialist qualifications, wish not to take responsibility for the education of a child with a disability. In such a situation, the most often suggested form of schooling, is individual education<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> H.M. Warnock 1978, p. 121; after: A. Zamkowska 2013, p. 71.

<sup>12</sup> See: A. Zamkowska 2013, p. 73; see: D. Jankowska, L. Legierska, *Prawo a rzeczywistość kształcenia uczniów ze specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi*, [in:] *Racjonalność oraz uwarunkowania procesów terapeutycznych osób niepełnosprawnych*, (ed.) A. Klinik, vol. 16, Impuls, Kraków-Katowice 2013, pp. 80-81.

<sup>13</sup> A. Zamkowska 2013, p. 71; see: G. Szumski, *Funkcje szkół specjalnych w proinTEGRACYJNYM systemie kształcenia – analiza doświadczeń zachodnioeuropejskich*, *Rocznik Pedagogiki Specjalnej* 2000, vol. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 72; see: A. Vlachou, *Education and inclusive policy-making: implications for research and practice*, *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 2004, no. 8(1).

<sup>15</sup> J. Oleksy, *Edukacja inkluzyjna – pomiędzy szansą a zagrożeniem*, [in:] *Uczeń z niepełnosprawnością w szkole ogólnodostępnej*, (ed.) Z. Gajdzica, Humanitas, Sosnowiec 2011, p. 42; see: Z. Sękowska, *Wprowadzenie do pedagogiki specjalnej*, Wydawnictwo WSPS, Warszawa 1998, p. 32 and p. 40.

In result of the numerous difficulties related to the expansion of inclusive education, one may observe two distinct attitudes among the teachers, and the parents: a critique of the idea of integrated schooling, and the call to return to the special system, as well as, a call to reform the entire educational system, so that it would become more friendly towards children with disabilities<sup>16</sup>. However, introducing the educational reforms in Poland, one should not transfer the established models from other countries, without considering the specific social, political, and economical situation of our country. Holding to the established models (without considering the unique cultural factors, as well as, the economic development, and the distinct social experiences of a given country), may cause the occurrence of the so-called equivalence error. Using the established models, without considering the specifics of a given country, results in lowering their efficiency and usefulness<sup>17</sup>.

### **Integrated education in the experiences of teachers – the methodological basis of own research**

Integrated education is subject to continuous modifications and changes, as its effects are far from those assumed. The analysis of the results described in source literature, indicates, that the integration effort in Polish education, lasting for more than twenty years, did not yield the expected results regarding the idea of integration. Therefore, an important, and prevailing subject is the barriers and limi-

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<sup>16</sup> S. Kowalik, *Integracja uczniów niepełnosprawnych z uczniami pełnosprawnymi*, [in:] *Psychologia ucznia i nauczyciela*, (ed.) S. Kowalik, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2011, p. 280.

<sup>17</sup> Z. Gajdzica, *Opinie nauczycieli szkół ogólnodostępnych na temat edukacji włączającej uczniów z lekkim upośledzeniem umysłowym w kontekście toczącej się reformy kształcenia specjalnego*, [in:] *Uczeń z niepełnosprawnością w szkole ogólnodostępnej*, red. Z. Gajdzica, Humanitas. Sosnowiec 2011, p. 57; see: G. Szumski, *Integracyjne kształcenie niepełnosprawnych. Sens i granice zmiany edukacyjnej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2006, p. 15.

Table 1. The primary aims and issues during the subsequent phases of the studies

Phase of the study	Study aims	Primary issues	Type of study
I <i>The organisational and material aspect of integrated study</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To diagnose the material and organisational aspect of integrated education, realised in Polonia Maior elementary schools</li> <li>2. To recognise the difficulties experienced by the principals of the Polonia Maior elementary schools that execute integrated education.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How is the integrated education organised in Polonia Maior elementary schools?</li> <li>2. What are the difficulties experienced by the principals, regarding organising an integrated educational?</li> </ol>	quantitative
II <i>Various aspects of the teachers' work in integrated classrooms</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To determine the features of teachers working in integrated classrooms</li> <li>2. To determine, how the teachers in integrated classrooms perceive the school reality (the selected features of the situations)</li> <li>3. To examine, how the teachers in integrated classrooms perceive the students with disabilities</li> <li>4. To distinguish and characterise the three various categories, in which a student with a disability may be perceived</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the features of the teachers in integrated classrooms?</li> <li>2. How the teachers in integrated classrooms perceive the school reality (the selected features of the situations)?</li> <li>3. How the teachers in integrated classrooms perceive the students with disabilities?</li> </ol>	quantitative
III <i>The narratives of the teachers that perceive students with disabilities differently</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To characterise the teachers who perceive the students with disabilities differently</li> <li>2. To explain the possible causes of these differences among teachers, that result from their particular features</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the features of the examined teachers?</li> <li>2. How the examined teachers perceive the school reality (the selected features of situations)?</li> <li>3. How the examined teachers perceive students with disabilities?</li> </ol>	qualitative
IV <i>The parents of students in integrated classes on integrated education</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To determine how the parents of students in integrated classrooms perceive the school reality (the selected features of the situations)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How the parents of students in integrated classrooms perceive the school reality (the selected features of the situations)?</li> </ol>	quantitative

tations regarding the implementation of the idea of integration within Polish schools. The object of my research (within the framework of my dissertation)<sup>18</sup>, are the features of the Polonia Maior elementary schools, with their integrated units, as well as, the features of the teachers that work there. Various participants of integrated education – principals, teachers, and parents, were included in the study, in order to present their own experiences and opinions regarding this form of educating children with disabilities. Considering various scholarly perspectives, required the application of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The research conducted, is an example of a triangulation of methods. Table 1 presents, in a general overview, the scholarly aims and the issues that appear in the subsequent (four) phases of the study.

The following article will present the conclusions from the second phase of the studies (aiming at learning the various aspects of the work of teachers in integrated classrooms, such as: features of the teachers and their school situation). Information regarding this subject was gathered due to the questionnaire directed both at the leading and support teachers, working in Polonia Maior elementary schools (that participated in the first phase of the studies).

### **Leading and support teachers – similarities and differences**

The characteristic feature of integrated education is the network of special aid in a mainstream school. The distinct (specific) feature of this type of education, is the person of the support teacher, whose role to support not only the students and their parents, but also the leading teachers. An important factor determining the proper

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<sup>18</sup> The following study was conducted in the 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 school years, within the framework of a dissertation titled: "Integrated education in the experiences and the opinions of teachers and parents" written under the supervision of professor S. Dylak. The dissertation was reviewed by prof. I Chrzanowska, and prof. Z. Gajdzic.



course of integrated education is a type of relation between the leading and the support teachers, and their way of working with the students in the classroom. The information regarding various aspects of the work of the teachers in integrated education, was gathered from leading and support teachers from 24 elementary schools, that execute integrated education in Polonia Maior<sup>19</sup>. The feedback questionnaires were collected in schools that, during the first phase of the study, received high scores as they provided the proper material and organisational conditions for integrated education. Therefore, one may assume, that the gathered data regarding the teachers' work in integrated classrooms, better reflect the situation of establishment adjusted for integrated education.

Analysing the number of acquired questionnaires from leading (93) and support (80) teachers, it is noticeable, that the rate is almost 1:1, despite the fact, that many more leading teachers work in 4-6 grade elementary school classrooms, than support teachers. The situation may result from the fact, that the questionnaires were filled primarily by early grade classrooms, while, in later grades (4-6), primarily by leading teachers, as educators of integrated classes, and support teachers. Therefore, one may assume, that the gathered data on the work of the teachers in integrated classrooms, better reflect the situation of those teachers who are involved in the process of education of children with disabilities in mainstream schools (they spend more working hours in these classes, therefore they may have a greater sense of responsibility for them)<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> The study regarding various aspects of the work of the teachers in integrated classrooms (their features, their perception of the school situation, and of the students with disabilities), was conducted in the 2008/2009 school year. The information was gathered using questionnaires directed at leading and support teachers. Feedback questionnaires were collected from teachers from 24 elementary schools, executing integrated education in Polonia Maior, being two-thirds (66%) of the establishment encompassed by the diagnostic study on the organisational and material aspect of this form of education (I phase of study).

<sup>20</sup> The estimative analysis shows, that the support teachers participated in the study in higher quantity, as c. three-fourths (73%) teachers employed in establishments encompassed by the study, filled the questionnaire. The situation is

The factor that internally differentiates the group of leading and support teachers, is their preparedness for working with students with disabilities. Half of the examined leading teachers (50%), graduated various post-diploma studies dedicated to working with children with intellectual disabilities. No less than 78% of the leading teachers, were educated in oligophrenic pedagogy. The analysis of the information regarding the support teachers background, provides rather surprising data. A strong majority of support teachers (76%) turned out to be teachers educated within the field of special pedagogy. Almost one-fourth of them (23%), are people that possess high-education in the subject matter. The remaining teachers from this group, possess basic pedagogical education (77%). In order to become a support teacher, these individuals received additional education in special pedagogy, most often attending studies in the field of *oligophrenic pedagogy* (53%). The graduates of the 5-year studies in special pedagogy, were a minority (24% of the examined support teachers). Half of them expand their specialist competencies regarding working with children with developmental disabilities.

Additionally, the leading and the support teachers vary regarding motivation that drove them to work in an integrated classroom. In terms of leading teachers, the role was enforced on them (they resulted from the decision of their superiors), therefore, the influence of external factors was dominant in this group. Circa two-thirds of the teachers, were directed by external motivation, adjusting to the changing educational offer, and the capabilities of a given establishment. The issue is quite different in the case of support teachers, as their motives were much more varied. The prevailing motives, were related to the features of the teachers (their education, vocational predispositions, beliefs, or earlier experiences). The external factors played a much lesser role in this group.

The difference between the aforementioned groups is also visible in the evaluation of their readiness to work in an integrated

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different, regarding the leading teachers – a little below half of them (46%) filled the questionnaire.

class, received during studies. Half of the leading teachers, and two-thirds of support teachers assumed, that they were well prepared to work in an integrated class. The difference may come from a fact, that the support teachers (contrary to leading teachers) are required to have a specialist background. This group of teachers is also distinguished by the broader extent of their activities regarding acquiring additional education, and expanding their vocational competencies. The support teachers more often utilise various forms of vocational self-improvement, and their activities in this aspect are much more varied. The specifics of the supportive role, placing much more responsibility on teachers, regarding working with students with disabilities, motivates them to expand vocational competencies, and search for solutions to the varying issues experienced at work.

Analysing the declared principles of the cooperation between the teachers of a given integrated classroom, in many situations, one may notice a clear division of responsibilities, between the leading, and the support teacher. Only one in five of leading teachers, involves himself in creating the proprietary, and less than a half leading teachers prepare didactic aid for all the students, along with the support teacher. In half of the studied establishments, the situation of incomplete support occurs, where the support teacher is present only at a selected portion of classes. Depending on the strategies of handling such situations, assumed by the leading teacher, it may encourage him to include the students with disabilities into the main course of the lesson, but also, may lead to an unfavourable situation, where these students, without the help of a support teacher, will participate in class, but only passively.

The groups of the examined teacher, perceive the way of working with a student with a disability in class, in a similar manner. The similarity, probably results from the fact, that a particular way of a student's work in class, in an integrated classroom, reflects the assumed principles of cooperation between the teachers. More than a half of the leading and the support teachers assumed, that the students with disabilities perform the same tasks, along with

the rest of the class, but for half of the work time. The remaining study subjects admitted, that this group of students either works together with others (performing the same tasks), or they attend individual rehabilitation activities, during the time of the lesson for the class. Considering the criteria, established earlier, one may state, that the excluded way of working with this group of students, is dominant. Both the clear division of tasks between the teachers, as well as, varying activities of the students with disabilities in class, do not help the integration of the children in a group, but strengthen the differences between them.

The view, that not all children with disabilities should attend mainstream schools, is dominant among the examined teachers. A majority of them advocates conditional integration, presenting an opinion, that only the students with a mild degree of disability have a chance for integration in mainstream establishments, and the remaining ones should attend special establishments, where their optimal conditions of development are ensured. At times, the presence of students with intellectual disabilities (including mild intellectual disabilities) in integrated classrooms, is also questioned. Few examined teachers assumed, that the issue regarding which child should be taken into integrated education, should be discussed individually, and the decision should be made after a detailed evaluation of the capabilities of the child, the school, and the conditions within the family. Support teachers approached the problem more thoughtfully, mentioning the complexity, and the numerous determinants of the problem.

The analysis of the data, also indicated that the support teachers know the students with disabilities better, and they are better prepared to work with this group of children, which is probably a result of their support role in class. This disproportion, between the competencies of the teachers that are co-responsible for the process of integrated education, may be the reason, why in one out of five integrated classes, a strict distinction of responsibilities between the teachers, exists. The situation of the lack of common activities between the teachers (the leading teachers are primarily responsible

for working with able-bodied students, and the support teachers, for working with students with disabilities), causes the integrated class to be divided into two separate groups. However, such activities fail to aid the integration of the students in the classroom.

Apart from having a better background, the support teachers group is also characterised by more positive, and less negative work experiences. These teachers feel better in the role of an integrated classroom teacher, despite the fact that they, to a larger degree, experience various difficult situations related to their role in the classroom. Having broader competencies and more expert skills, helpful in handling various different situations in the classroom, they feel better and more confident in the role of a teacher of an integrated class. The specifics of the support role (with larger responsibilities for working with students with disabilities, being placed on the teacher), motivates them to expand their vocational competencies, and search for solutions of the varying problems experienced at work.

The analysis showed, that the varying roles, played by the teachers working together in one class, implicate certain problems and difficulties for each of them. Leading teachers, responsible for the main course of the lesson, are experiencing a feeling of the lack of comprehensive (full-time) support from the support teacher. Working in an integrated classroom, reveals their insufficient theoretical background regarding working with students with disabilities, and the lack of earlier experiences in the area, additionally impedes the realisation of the process of integrated education. The problem, related to the low number of hours dedicated to revalidation activities, also affects the leading teachers as well, as being responsible for holding class, they have no capability of working with each student with a disability individually. By analogy, too many students in an integrated class, may become burdensome for a teacher responsible for holding the class.

Support teachers, responsible for working with students that experience various problems with studying, to a higher degree, experience the lack of specialist study aids, for students with disabilities, and the insufficient material and organisational background

of the integrated education establishment. The leading teacher is offered an entire array of support, primarily from the second teacher, co-responsible for the process of integrated education. However, the support teacher, as a person that is competent and dedicated to provide help, is much more prone to experiencing the lack of support from other specialists, or teachers that work in a given school. The support teacher is also more responsible for the cooperation, and providing help to the parents of children that manifest various difficulties in studying, often with behavioural disorders, and sometimes, children from families burdened with certain pathologies. The cooperation with children with various difficulties is particularly important, as its lack may be considered as a large impediment in the work of a teacher in an integrated class.

However, the majority of the respondents, present positive opinions regarding the cooperation with the second teacher co-responsible for the process of integrated education, highlighting its enormous significance in the process of integration of all the students in the classroom. However, one in three teachers, claims that the cooperation is based on the *explicit division of responsibilities between the two*, which does not benefit the integration of the children in school. The work method, based on the clear division of tasks between the teachers, may cause an unfavourable situation, in which the leading teacher feels responsible only for the education of the able-bodied students, while the support teacher, responsible for the education of the students with disabilities.

### **Specific issues resulting from the organisation and the realisation of integrated education**

Integrated classes display specific characteristics. One of them is the expanded support network, directed not only at the students with disabilities, and their parents, but also, at the leading teachers that face new professional challenges. The experiences of the respondents show, that the leading teachers receive help primarily

from other individuals, employed in the particular school, mostly, from the support teachers that work with them in one class. The respondents feel little support from various specialist establishments, or establishments working beyond their own school.

The analysis of the factors that limit the efficiency of integrated education, had revealed the insufficient background of some leading teachers, for working with students with disabilities. Additionally, the lack of previous vocational experiences in the area, handicaps (according to the leading teachers), the realisation of the process of integrated education. Also, the examined respondents from both groups, notice numerous difficulties related to the material and the organisational aspect of integrated education, listing, i.a.: flawed selection of students, too many students in class, too much variety among students with a recommendation for special education, regarding the type, and the degree of their disability, as well as, able-bodied students displaying certain deficits. The entire array of experienced issues is related to the insufficient funds, dedicated to the functioning of such integrated classes.

Secondly, the respondents from both groups list those factors that limit the efficiency of integrated education, related to the students with disabilities. The teachers describe the difficulties, which result from the features of these students (their intellectual or emotional limitations, or their low level of ability, and self-sufficiency). Often, in an integrated class, appear problems related to the disordered behaviour, or social inadequacy of some children with disabilities, that impedes the work during the lesson, and discourages able-bodied children from coming into contact with these students. Increasingly, the teachers undermine the reason for accepting children with intellectual disabilities, to integrated classes, assuming, that this group of students has little chances of integrating with a group, particularly in higher grades (IV-VI). The situation of these students in school is also worsened by their regular absence, or the school's distance from their place of living (in consequence, leading to the fact, that the commuting children, cannot maintain close relations with their friends, after school). Individual respondents raised

the issue of able-bodied students that attend integrated classes, highlighting that the inadequate selection of able-bodied children may reduce the efficiency of this form of education.

The specific nature of problems that appear in integrated education, i.a. results from the fact, that the realisation of this form of education of children with disabilities, causes the occurrence of a particular network of relations, absent in other forms of special education. The relations between teachers (the leading and the support teacher), between the students (able-bodied and with disabilities), as well as, parents, is characteristic of integrated education. The specific nature of issues resulting from the organisation of special education in mainstream schools, is also apparent in the difficulties faced by teachers in the process of establishing cooperation with parents.

The key role in this form of education, seems to be played by the support teacher, whose purpose is to provide specialist help to a student with disability, to his family, as well as, to the leading teacher. The varied support activities are conducted in order to include the child with a developmental disorder, to the mainstream of class activities, to the highest degree possible, so that the child has the opportunity for full participation, both in the educational, and the social aspects. In order for the process of education to be conducted properly, the class should not be clearly divided into two groups of students (able-bodied and with disabilities). In result, there should be no division of tasks and responsibilities between the teacher working in class. The lack of common activities between the teachers, does not benefit the integration of students in class, and may even strengthen certain differences between the children. Therefore, wrongly perceived support provided by the support teacher to the leading teacher, leads to the deformation of the idea of integrated education, as it causes a situation, in which the leading teacher is primarily responsible for the education of health children, while the support teacher is responsible for children with developmental disorders.

The mutual responsibility of teachers, for the education of all students in the integrated class, is key. The activities of teachers,



aiming at the inclusion of students with disabilities into the common course of the lesson, and the efforts aimed at aiding these students, so that they would not depart from the rest of the group, serve the purpose of integrating all children in class. As the gathered data shows, the cooperation of teachers is based on mutual activities and mutual responsibility, occurs rarely. In the majority of integrated classrooms, the excluded model of working with students with disabilities, is dominant<sup>21</sup>. Both the clear division of tasks between the teachers, as well as, the separate activities of the students with developmental disorders, fail to aid the integration of the children in the group, only to strengthen their differences.

Another issue that impedes the development of integrated education in Poland, is the dominant belief among the teachers, that not all children with disabilities should attend mainstream schools. The majority of respondents, advocates for the conditional integration, presenting an opinion, that only the students with a mild level of disability, have a chance for integration in mainstream schools, and the remaining ones should attend special establishments, where their optimal conditions for development are ensured. At times, the very presence of the students with intellectual disabilities (including mild levels) in integrated classrooms, is questioned. Few respondents assumed, that the issue regarding which children should be taken for integrated education, should be considered individually, and that the decision should be made after a detailed evaluation of the capabilities of the child, the school, and the conditions within the family. The conditional approach, dominant in thinking of integration (based on the division of the features of the children with developmental disorders – “*fit*” and “*unfit*” for integration) causes the integrated education to be based on a selection process (instead of a detailed analysis of all the aspects of the situation, the diagnosis

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<sup>21</sup> The following criterion was applied in the study: if a student with a disability, works with other children for the majority of time, performing the same tasks, than this type of working with a group of students is “inclusive”. However, if the time of separate activities is greater than the time of common work (50% or less), than this way of working with that group of studies is „excluding”.

regarding the type and degree of disability is the dominant factor). Therefore, integrated education becomes discriminant, contrary to the initial (however idealistic) premises of the promoters of *“the same school for everyone”* ideal.

### **To summarise, about the pro-integration culture of the school**

The new, pro-integration trends in Polish education, show, that the education of children displaying certain developmental disorders, has become a general pedagogical issue, outside of a narrow group of specialists. The introduction of integrated and inclusive education to Polish schools, cause the change of the educational culture. Therefore, one may distinguish a culture of school towards the Other, assuming a pro-integration, or an anti-integration form. A very important role, in the shaping of a particular school culture, is played by the teachers, their motivation towards work, their professional background, as well as, the way they perceive the students with developmental disorders<sup>22</sup>.

In relation to the changes, that have appeared in education, and within the school culture, it becomes necessary to introduce organisational and didactic changes to universities. The university curricula, should be modified, to prepare the students of pedagogical degrees for working at a modern school, to the best of possibility. Creating a pro-integration culture of a school, requires this vocational group to not only have a broader knowledge, but also, to acquire new social skills/competencies. Without the proper preparation of the teachers, the integrated and inclusive education, assumes, and will assume various, distorted forms. The change of the school culture, resulting from the increase of the number of students

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<sup>22</sup> More of the subject may be found in an article by M. Pachowicz, titled: *Uczeń niepełnosprawny widziany oczami nauczycieli klas integracyjnych*, [in:] *Miejsce Innego we współczesnych naukach o wychowaniu. W poszukiwaniu pozytywów*, (eds.) I. Chrzanowska, B. Jachimczak, K. Pawelczak, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2013.

with disabilities and various developmental deficits, in mainstream schools, caused the issue of the Other, to be more than just marginal. Considering all the above, it would be advisable to approach the education of pedagogical degrees' students (of various specialities), in an interdisciplinary, and holistic way.

Changes related to the education of future teachers, cannot focus solely on the issues regarding providing the adequate knowledge to students. In the aspect of integrated and inclusive education, special attention must be directed at the shaping of an appropriate attitude of the future teachers, towards the Other in schools. Referring to two scales of culture – micro and macro<sup>23</sup>, these changes should encompass the system of values and obligations, with, simultaneously, seeing the individual plane of constructing meanings and realities, by the individuals that participate in culture. Referring to the book by J. Bruner "*The culture of education*" ("*Kultura edukacji*"), one may assume that "school itself is culture, and not only a way of preparing to participate in it"<sup>24</sup>, and that the particular activities of students and teachers, and their mutual relations create the school culture.

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<sup>23</sup> J.S. Bruner, *Kultura edukacji*, UNIVERSITAS, Kraków 2006, p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 140.

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